

WASHINGTON, D.C.-Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) made the following statement on the Floor of the House of Representatives regarding the 93rd anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide.

Costa is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and supported H. Res. 106, a resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide in the United States, when it came before him in Committee last October.

“Madam Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 93rd anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide, which was the first genocide of the 20th century and sadly, the template for a cycle of genocide that continues to this very day.

“It is, by any reasonable standard, established history that between 1915 and 1923 the Ottoman Empire systematically killed an estimated 1.5 million Armenians and drove hundreds of thousands of others into exile from their ancestral homeland. The record of this atrocity is well documented in the United States Archives and has been universally accepted in the International Association of Genocide Scholars and the broader historical and academic communities.

“However, there is still debate around the world, including here in our nation, on whether this incident actually qualifies as genocide. On April 26, 1915, the New York Times reported on the first reported purges of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey. Later in 1915, the Times ran a front page article about a report from the Committee on Armenian Atrocities discussing exactly what was happening to Armenians in Turkey. ‘The report tells of children under 15 years of age thrown into the Euphrates to be drowned; of women forced to desert infants in their arms and to leave them by the roadside to die; of young women and girls appropriated by the Turks, thrown into harems, attacked or else sold to the highest bidder, and of men murdered and tortured.’

“One can debate specific historical incidents, but growing up in Fresno, California, the land of William Saroyan, I heard stories shared by grandparents from the Kezerian, Koligian and Abramhian families about being forced to leave their homes, the stories of the long marches, and the random murders. Clearly, they believed there was a systematic approach to eliminate the Armenian communities in places that had been their homes and farms for centuries. My Armenian friends believe this systematic approach was among the first genocides of the 20th century, and so do I.

“Around the world, in the single, longest lasting and far-reaching campaign of genocide denial, Turkey seeks to block recognition of this travesty. It's against the law to even mention the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. The Armenian Genocide involved the issue of man's injustice to mankind, and it continued to occur throughout the 20th century in the Holocaust, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and now in Darfur. As leaders, we must confront this and not allow Turkey to continue to stand alone and ask us to believe that the Armenian Genocide was not genocide.

“In standing up to this policy of denial, we, of course, honor the martyrs of the genocide and we encourage our Turkish allies and friends to come to terms with their past. And, in a very powerful and significant way, we reinforce our own vital role, as Americans, in leading the international community toward unconditional opposition to all instances of genocide.

“Last October, the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed H. Res. 106, a resolution to recognize the Armenian Genocide in the United States. Unfortunately, this bill has yet to come before the full House for a vote. Supporters of this resolution are constantly told that now isn't the time to recognize the genocide, that scholars, not Congress, should determine if this event was genocide, or that passage of this resolution will hurt our relationship with Turkey. I could not disagree more with these statements.

“First, there is never a ‘right time’ to recognize genocide. Ninety-three years have passed since the start events occurred, and we cannot wait around for a convenient moment to recognize this truly catastrophic historical event. Secondly, the scholars have spoken and the historical record is clear and thoroughly documented. And finally, we have seen over and over again that Turkey's warning of disastrous consequences are dramatically overstated. In fact, in nearly every instance, Turkey's bilateral trade has gone up with each of the countries that have recognized the Armenian Genocide - including Canada, Italy, France, Russia, and Belgium.

“Genocide is not something that can simply swept under the rug and forgotten. We need leaders around the world to not only recognize it, but to condemn it so the world can truly say ‘Never Again.’ The United States cannot continue its policy of denial regarding the Armenian Genocide, and I encourage passage of H. Res. 106 to recognize the Armenian Genocide in our nation.”

